

LINGUISTIC, LITERARY AND CULTURAL FEATURES OF DIGITAL TRAVEL BROCHURES

Mariana COANĂ*

Abstract

Digital travel brochures have become one of the most effective and versatile tools of marketing. The paper aims to analyse three travel brochures created by Inntravel and Cook Islands Tourism to identify the linguistic devices used by the advertisers. Since the brochures are promotional documents, we make an overview of the linguistics of advertising then we identify and analyse the features of the respective brochures, considering the layout, the vocabulary and language use, the techniques for creating persuasive language and the cultural context. The findings show that the linguistic and literary features are complemented by cultural features to enhance the whole experience of travelling. Therefore, we highlight how these features (language choices, structures, description strategies, emotional appeals, testimonials, local culture, etc.) contribute to the persuasive impact of the analyzed brochures.

Keywords: travel, brochure, linguistic features, literary features, cultural features, advertising

JEL Classification: Z13, Z32, Z33

1. Introduction

Digital advertising has become one of the most important tools of marketing strategies. This is essential in the economic, touristic, cultural life, etc., especially due to the competition between organizations in specific industries that strive to differentiate their products and services, through innovative marketing strategies. In the hospitality industry, digital brochures contribute to the attraction of new visitors even if “tourism is an intangible product as it cannot be tested before purchase [Bhatia, (2006: 247)].” The role of promotional communication has been investigated by many researchers. For example, while researchers analyze the motivation to co-create and how it mediates the relationship between online information sources and destination image [Garcia-Haro et al. (2021)], another study highlights the strengths and weaknesses of tourism websites, in a comparative content analysis of world’s top tourist destinations, from the perspective of tourism promotion, using the modified Balanced Score Card (BSC) approach [Singh & Bhatia (2016)]. Likewise, from the perspective of tourism advertising, many researchers have investigated the role of linguistics and semiotics in advertisements. The structural-linguistic theories, developed by R. Barthes, R. Lindekers, focus on the semiological analysis of the message. However, A. Stoichitoiu-Ichim (1997) contends that these structural-linguistic theories

* Mariana Coancă is at the Romanian American University in Bucharest.

emphasize only the intentional meanings in the semiological analysis of the message, neglecting the socio-cultural context of communication and the active role of the receiver, who decodes the message and establishes its meanings. In the 60's and 70's, the advertising intensified and researches put an increasing emphasis on the awareness of the creation of advertising messages according to the interests and preferences of target audiences. That is why, we bring into discussion Greimas, who introduces the concept of isotopy [Greimas, (1966, 1976)] and proposes the analysis of the advertising message from the perspective of the advertising isotopy which "selects the referential elements from a certain natural language and gives them a denotative and symbolic status, and expresses the connotations in a set of persuasive signs (linguistic and iconic)." Greimas establishes three forms of advertising isotopy: the narrative isotopy, which is based on cultural references; the descriptive isotopy, which lists the qualities of the presented object; the argumentative isotopy, which ensures the connection between the fiction and the represented object [Greimas, (1966, 1976)].

This paper focuses on identifying and analyzing the the linguistic, literary and cultural features of three digital travel brochures which promote the European and the Cook Islands tourism. Brochures can be useful tools for students who attend English for Specific Purposes courses, in the sense that they give them the opportunity to get to know better the linguistic, literary and cultural features of these promotional documents. At the same time, the paper highlights the vocabulary and language used in the respective brochures and exemplifies how they have a persuasive effect on the reader to organize "the holiday of a lifetime". As for the organization and structure of these brochures, we analyzed the sections of the brochures and the role of descriptions, which follow the headlines or slogans, in conveying accurate and catchy information. Last but not least, we analyze how the language and tone resonates with the interests or preferences of the target audience. Undoubtedly, the use of clear language and well-structured content enhances the accessibility and usability of the brochures. Positive language is used to describe the experiences of past visitors, emphasizing their satisfaction and encouraging potential travelers to follow in their footsteps. Cultural elements play a significant role in the travel brochures as they provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the destination's culture and how they can engage in cultural experiences or participate in local events during their visit. Therefore, the use of persuasive strategies such as compelling stories, enticing descriptions, persuasive testimonials, and persuasive words or phrases create a desire to visit a destination.

Regarding the differences between digital and traditional brochures, in terms of effectiveness, user preferences, interactivity, and engagement, we believe that digital brochures offer many advantages such as multimedia capabilities, interactivity, and easy sharing to people who are computer literate, while traditional brochures create a sense of trust and provide tangible experiences to older people, who are not used to interact with new technologies.

2. The Linguistics of Advertising

When applied to advertising, linguistics focuses on the analysis of language use in promotional materials, such as advertisements, brochures, slogans, taglines, and marketing messages. The linguistics of advertising involves examining the various linguistic elements and strategies employed in advertising to convey messages,

persuade consumers, and shape perceptions. It explores how language is used to create impactful and persuasive advertising content. In this section we present the linguistics of advertising, considering the following key elements that contribute to the development of effective advertising strategies:

- *Language Choice and Style*: Advertisers carefully select language that resonates with their target audience, considering factors such as age, gender, cultural background, and regional preferences. The style of language used in advertising can range from formal and professional to informal and conversational, depending on the brand image and the desired connection with consumers. Checking the mechanics of messages and choosing an appropriate style and tone should be the primary goals of advertising campaigns.
- *Rhetoric and Persuasion*: Advertising always resorts to various rhetorical techniques to persuade consumers. Specifically, this involves the use of persuasive language features, such as rhetorical questions, emotional appeals, testimonials, comparisons, and claims of superiority. For example, a car advertisement may show a heartwarming family scene, triggering feelings of love, happiness, and a sense of togetherness. Or the commercial of a skincare product may showcase a celebrity endorsing its effectiveness, leveraging the influence and reputation of the individual to persuade consumers to try the product. Also, the use of phrases followed by exclamation marks like “Limited time offer, buy now!” urge consumers to react or take action. Many studies reveal the specific rhetorical strategies employed in advertisements and how they influence consumer behavior nowadays.
- *Wordplay and Creative Language Use*: Advertisements often employ wordplay, puns, slogans, and catchy phrases to grab attention and make the message unforgettable. For example, Nike’s “Just Do It” slogan encourages consumers to embrace an active lifestyle and overcome challenges, while McDonald’s “I’m Lovin’ It” creates a positive emotional connection with their food and dining experience. As technology evolves, researchers will continue to explore the creative use of language in online advertising, including the use of rhymes, alliteration, and other linguistic devices that impact the target audience.
- *Semiotics and Symbolism*: Linguistics intersects with semiotics in advertising, as language is used to convey meaning and symbolism. Advertisements often incorporate symbols, metaphors, and visual cues to communicate messages beyond the literal meaning of the words. The Apple logo itself is a good example of semiotics and symbolism. The bitten apple is a recognizable symbol associated with knowledge, curiosity, and the biblical story of Adam and Eve. Linguistic analyses can uncover the hidden meanings and associations embedded in logos and visuals. Dove uses symbolism to challenge conventional beauty standards (“Real Beauty”). By using diverse women of different sizes, ages, and ethnicities, the company promotes the concept of “beauty” through inclusivity and self-acceptance.
- *Branding and Tone*: Advertisements use specific language choices and tones to present the brand personality and values. Specific linguistic patterns and consistent use of language contribute to the brand image and positioning. For

example, the advertising language used by Airbnb often includes phrases like “Belong Anywhere,” “Live Like a Local,” and “Welcome Home” to create a sense of inclusivity, authenticity, and the idea of feeling at home while traveling.

- *Culture and Sociolinguistics*: Advertising language is influenced by cultural and sociolinguistic factors. Advertisers must adapt their language to the cultural norms, values, and preferences of the target market. Therefore, linguists’ contribution to localization services is crucial since they can examine how cultural references, idiomatic expressions, and language variations can be used in advertising to connect with specific audiences. For example, an advertisement targeting a Romanian-speaking audience in Spain may use language variations specific to that community, such as including Romanian phrases or references to culturally relevant events.

3. The Analysis of the Cook Islands and Inntravel Brochures

Our study is based on three digital travel brochures, created by agencies for various tourist attractions in the Cook Islands and Europe. The different types of reasons that travel companies create digital informational text include to voice their reputation, to describe their offer, to guide, to inform, to advise, to warn, to explain and to persuade potential visitors to buy the tourist package. Travel brochures are considered promotional documents as they advertise vacation packages, specific destinations and tours, hotels and exotic places. Therefore, our analysis showcases not only the common linguistic and literary features and structures found in the selected tourist brochures but also their cultural features highlighted through the use of advertising discourse.

- *Vocabulary and Language Use*: When designing a brochure the most important thing that one should notice is the visual balance between the photos, color schemes and the textual information. The psychological effects of colors and the informative effects of descriptions can influence the tourist’s choice of a destination. The respective brochures use rich and descriptive vocabulary to create a favorable impression of destinations in the Cook Islands and Europe. For example, they frequently use positive and superlative adjectives, and catchy language to entice potential visitors. Moreover, they employ specific terminology related to local attractions or amenities, cultural activities and landmarks to provide further information about the destination.

“Our little paradise is home to the entertainers of the Pacific, displaying the essences of Cook Islands heritage. A Cook Islands cultural dance show or island string band is just what you need to add that extra island flavor to your special day.”

“Vai Nauri is the largest, freshwater cave in Mitiaro and is immensely popular with both locals and visitors alike.”

“This holiday follows the wine route of Alsace, a region rich in heritage, culture & gastronomy where valleys are characterized by well-kept vineyards and impossibly pretty villages.”

The use of local language, translated or explained, is meant to assist travelers in engaging with the local community (see the examples below). This linguistic support

connects visitors with the culture and facilitates interactions with locals. Moreover, they include information about the community, its history, art, crafts, traditional practices, and what opportunities are given to visitors for cultural immersion experiences.

“A lot of the farmers believe that the food crops grown in their plantations are “the food of our *tupuna* (ancestors).”

“Get amongst the local mama’s and learn the art of *tivaevae* making! The mama’s love sharing their knowledge and stories about how they learnt to sew and make many other crafts in Mitiaro.”

Finally, we identified the companies’ intention to give the language of brochures a deeper meaning and sensation through metaphors and similes. Unlike the Cook Islands brochures, the Inntravel brochure highlights its branding strategy on the first page, using poetry techniques such as repetition of words, alliteration, rhyme and rhythm. The verses contain the adjectives “slow”, “revitalized”, “refreshed” and “energized”, and the verbs “immerse”, “meet”, “eat”, “explore” to explain the concept of “Slow holiday”, to get attention instantly and draw the readers in, as shown below:

“What do we mean by Slow?
Slow is a state of mind.
Slow is looking differently at the world.
Seeing things – people, landscapes
from a new perspective.
Slow is a place.
Slow is where time doesn’t stand still,
it expands.
Where you see more by slowing down.
Immersing yourself into local life...”

If we apply Jakobson’s theory of language (1960), we observe three functions of the language used in travel brochures as follows:

- The referential function, which focuses on conveying factual information about the destinations. Sometimes words from the local language are used to highlight the essence of a place and to create a desire in the readers to visit the place.

“The Loire Valley is famous for pretty rivers and dazzling châteaux built by France’s royalty.”

- The conative function, which is aimed at influencing or persuading the reader.

“With two nights in charming Middleham, you get to start your holiday with a visit to the striking ruins of the town’s castle, dubbed ‘Windsor of the North’ as it was the favorite home of King Richard III.”

- The poetic function, which focuses on the aesthetic and creative aspects of language, highlighting the form, structure and artistic use of language, often found in poetry and literature.

“Nothing beats a striking sunset, as the sky erupts in a masterpiece of gold, orange, purple and pink perfection.”

The way information is conveyed through travel brochures is very important, as the goal is to color the language to motivate or win over the receiver. Therefore, the use of various literary devices, such as metaphors, rhymes, alliterations, even names of tours adapted from the title of books can create an emotional connection with the readers. For example, the name of the tour “A Trail of Three Cities. Seville, Cordoba & Granada” was influenced by the title of the historical novel, “A Tale of Two Cities”, by Charles Dickens.

The choice of language and style aims to resonate with the interests and preferences of a broad target audience. By incorporating an inclusive, a friendly yet a professional language and tone in the brochures, the organizations promote equality and respect for all readers. Thus they create an environment where everyone feels welcomed. The visual and graphic elements provide a visual representation of the destination’s attractions and are placed strategically to support the textual information.

- *Persuasive Language:* The brochures are designed to persuade readers to visit the Cook Islands and countries in Europe such as United Kingdom of Great Britain, France, Italy, Slovenia, Greece, Spain, etc. They rely on persuasive techniques - superlatives and especially sensory language - to elicit emotional responses and create a sense of desire to visit the heart of Yorkshire Dales, the Jersey Island, the Loire Valley, villages of the Dordogne, Gironde’s vineyards rivers & valleys, Austria’s Stubay Valley, Leutasch Valley, the Valley of Gold in Portugal, Madeira, Tenerife, etc.

“Mitiaro has a distinctive story, plus the unique appeal of some of the most stunning subterranean limestone pools and caves in Polynesia.”

“Stunning views continue below the crystal clear waters where marine life is abundant, colorful and diverse in the lagoon.”

“Infused with Gallic influences, and abundant with succulent seafood, rich dairy ice-cream and those famous potatoes, Jersey is an island to savour.”

Since they are personalized and customized to meet the specific needs and preferences of potential travelers, digital brochures can lead to travel planning through instant decision making. Also, persuasion and brand recognition are enhanced through the travelers’ testimonials or reviews of the travel experience:

“The abundance of wild flowers was just astounding. Views to die for and everything you expect from Greece: blue skies, white villages and nice people; and the food was pretty good, too.”

“This was the most beautiful walking holiday we have ever done. The whole of Slovenia is beautiful, unspoiled and well cared for – we ate superbly, breathed wonderful air and drank pure delicious water. The walks were utterly beautiful, a bit challenging on day one, but fabulously rewarding!”

- *Structure and Organization:* The brochures have a clear structure and organization to convey information effectively, by guiding readers through the content logically, from an initial introduction to more specific information. The introduction of the Mitiaro and Raratonga brochures provides a brief description of the location and its unique features such as One big resort, The ultimate family destination, The needle, Hiking and beyond, and Getting around is so easy!.

The Inspirations brochure created by Inntravel provides an overview of the company, describing itself as a travel company whose activity concentrates on *Slow Holidays*. A slow holiday allows “visitors to take the time to savor every moment, fully engage with their surroundings and experience the chosen destination *up close*, much as the locals do.” Also, the company details how its mission subscribes to the principles of sustainable tourism.

The body of the brochures is divided into sections, each focusing on different aspects like key attractions, landmarks, cultural heritage, activities and experiences that capture the essence of the location, accommodations, maps, domestic air travel, currency & banking, transportation, telecommunications, weather, electricity and contact information. Each country or region is introduced by an attention-grabbing headline, superlative adjectives, slogan or quotation of famous people, followed by a brief introduction highlighting the attractions of the destination:

[France

A feast for the senses

“*One cannot impose unity on a nation that has 264 kinds of cheese*”, Charles de Gaulle is said to have complained. For us, though, France’s rich regional variations are a cause for celebration – from its superbly diverse food and wines to scenery that includes both the graceful Loire Valley and the wild and untamed Atlantic Pyrenees.

Heart of Europe

So beautiful, so traditional and truly distinctive

“*We will either find a way, or make one*”, said a determined Hannibal, on reaching the Alps with his army around 200BC. Over two thousand years later, we’re still finding new ways through the heart of Europe, and the lofty lands of Austria, Germany, Switzerland and Slovenia are a constant source of surprise – and delight.”]

The Attractions and Landmarks section describes specific attractions and landmarks in Raratonga, Mitiaro and Europe, their historical background, unique features and special considerations for visiting such as nights, meals, dates, prices and contact information. Information about lodging options in the destination is included in this section. It features descriptions, images, and details about family hotels (“For almost five centuries, the Plesnik family has lived and worked in this enchanted valley, protecting the environment and preserving their culture...”), resorts, guesthouses, or other types of accommodations available. The Dining and Cuisine section in each brochure focuses on the local culinary scene and dining options. The Inspirations brochure includes not only descriptions of popular local dishes, but also descriptions of restaurants, cafes, street food, or food markets. Information such as cuisine types, specialties, and recommendations are provided. The brochures conclude with a section providing contact details and websites where readers can find more information or make inquiries. Social media handles and QR codes related to the destinations are also included.

4. Conclusion

Travel brochures evoke emotions through compelling descriptions and persuasive techniques, which are intrinsically linked to the human desire to discover new places and learn about new cultures. The paper analyzes the linguistic, literary and

cultural features, as they shape the advertising strategy of the investigated travel brochures. Our study uncovers the persuasive techniques, discursive practices and the creative language used to influence the readers. In conclusion, the text samples illustrate how the specific vocabulary, literary devices, descriptive and persuasive techniques are employed so as to evoke positive emotions and create a connection with potential travelers.

References

1. Bhatia, A., K. 2006. *International Tourism Management*. Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 3rd revised edition.
2. Cook Islands Tourism. 2022. Mitiaro Brochure. <https://brochure.cookislands.travel/mitiario/>
3. Cook Islands Tourism. 2022. Rarotonga Brochure. <https://brochure.cookislands.travel/rarotonga/>
4. Garcia-Haro, Maria Angeles, Maria Pilar Martinez-Ruiz, Ricardo Martinez-Cañás, and Pablo Ruiz-Palomino. 2021. “Benefits of Online Sources of Information in the Tourism Sector: The Key Role of Motivation to Co-Create” *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research* 16, no. 6: 2051-2072. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jtaer16060115>
5. Greimas, Algirdas, J. 1966. *Sémantique Structurale: Recherche de Methode*. Paris: Larousse.
6. Greimas, Algirdas, J. 1976. *Sémiotique et Sciences Sociales*. Paris: Seuil.
7. Inntravel. 2023. Inspirations Holiday Brochure. www.inntravel.co.uk
8. Jakobson, R. 1960. “Linguistics and Poetics”, in T. Sebeok, ed., *Style in Language*, Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, pp. 350-377.
9. Singh, H. & Bhatia, J. 2016. Evaluation of Official Tourism Websites of World’s Leading Tourist Destinations using the Balanced Score-Card Approach. *Journal of Tourismology*, 2 (1), 35-49. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/iuturizmoloji/issue/24615/260503>
10. Stoichițoiu-Ichim, A. 1997. Strategii persuasive în discursul publicitar (I-II), în *Limbă și literatură*, vol. 2.